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AUTHOR Rogers, Sue F.
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ABSTRACT

A study examined preservice practicum teachers' use of field-based research to assess their teaching so that they might learn the positive aspects and successful instructional strategies utilized with at-risk students during the practicum field placement experience. Subjects were eight preservice teachers enrolled in a reading practicum undergraduate course to tutor four third-grade and four fourth-grade students with reading and language arts problems. For 7 weeks, the teachers used formal and informal assessment procedures with a theme balanced language approach. Responses on literacy development and instructional strategies were compiled separately. Results indicated that, in 5 of the 18 statements, teachers identified all of the positive characteristics exhibited by tutees at least occasionally or frequently in their classrooms: improved attitudes, confidence, accomplishments in their reading and academic work, and improved social skills. The instructional strategies rated as more successful by 57% of the teachers were in production, making and using word walls, and drawing and producing story maps. Findings suggest that the tutors had made a difference in the lives of the children who were tutored. (Contains five references; a form for the survey of tutored children is appended.) (Author/CR)

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FIELD-BASED RESEARCH: WHEN PRESERVICE PRACTICUM TEACHERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR STUDENTS

by
SUE F. ROGERS, ED.
AVERETT COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT

This research report concerns preservice practicum teachers using field-based research procedures to self-assess their teaching in order to learn the positive aspects and successful instructional strategies utilized with at-risk students during the practicum field placement experience.

Teacher educators are constantly discussing and experimenting with techniques to enable preservice teachers to be experienced decision makers by their graduation dates. Of course, to be not only experienced but better decision makers requires them to have the knowledge and ability to self-assess their teaching in order to make decisions on factual information as opposed to other arguments that possess less measurable data or reasons to keep or alter curriculums. Thus, for preservice teachers to become active participants of self-evaluation and utilize this skill when making creative curriculum decisions in educational programs in their future, they need to develop problem solving skills through research and critical thinking in their teacher education programs (Arnold, 1992).

According to Arnold (Arnold, 1992) in her research on the current trend for teacher education program undergraduates, work in self-assessment in past years has developed along a continuum now including five goals. These goals reflecting preservice teacher self-assessments evolved from the 1950's to present day. First, preservice teachers became interested in self-assessment to improve their instruction and then to develop their decision making skills. In later dates, preservice teachers conducted self-assessment research to help construct their own knowledge, then added reflection and critical thinking, and finally, they began to using self-assessment for working with present day concerns of what and why a curriculum works so that school reforms can become a reality (Arnold, 1992). Obviously, for this continuum of research and development of reflection to occur in educators' self-assessments, much time is needed for modeling by professors and interaction with classroom teachers and preservice teachers in a collaborative effort to benefit all participants. In Irvine's study (Irvine, 1983) to investigate preservice and supervisory teachers' relationships after implementing a program to enhance self-assessments and collegial relationships, she found that preservice teachers' self-assessments do moderately agree with supervisory

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teachers' assessments of them. When coupled with Arnold's study, it seems that beginning research with preservice teachers may encourage them to utilize research self-assessment knowledge and reflective thinking in the future. In addition, Arnold feels the longer the preservice teachers study self-assessment, the more they learn to use in later years. She states a longer term study could be at least a follow up semester (Arnold, 1992).

In Barbour's and Holmes study (Barbour and Holmes, 1987) of student teachers' journals at the University of Maryland they found self-assessment not to be of as much concern as was true prior to the student teaching experience. They questioned if student teachers became less analytical in their self-evaluations as they moved through the student teaching experience, perhaps becoming more interested in tangible items. Also, they wondered if this trend would continue into the first year of teaching. Again, when combining Arnold's study (Arnold, 1992) to strengthen research and thinking skills with Irvine's study (Irvine, 1983) on finding that preservice teachers can self-assess with Barbour's and Holmes' study on the failure of preservice teachers progressing in self-assessment until the student teaching experience and then dropping it, perhaps more as well as a longer period of preservice teacher participation in self-assessment research is needed. With long term research, follow up of another semester or course or even carrying it into the first year of teaching would perhaps be beneficial in developing reflective and creative thinking for classroom instruction, decision making and ultimately, in teachers using self-assessment to make informed and sound decisions concerning curriculum changes. Hence, to develop critical thinking teachers who utilize self-assessment techniques, it seems that preservice teachers need to be active participants in long term self-assessment research in their teacher education programs. Thus, in looking at one college's reading courses in the teacher education program, it was decided after considering the background information the most likely course in the teacher education program to begin the self-assessment project would be the Practicum in Reading course when students are tutoring only one child and have a weekly conference with their college supervisor.

BACKGROUND IN PRACTICUM FIELD-BASED RESEARCH

After closing the college reading center in 1992, the college's Teacher Education Program's Practicum in Reading field placement was moved to a local public elementary school with a large at-risk student population which was determined be the high percentage of students on reduced or free lunch (approximately 75%) and by the high percentage of adults in the community with less than an eighth grade education (over 25%). This school has some inclusion classrooms. Adjustments and alterations in the placement program were made by both the elementary school and college personnel during the two years since inception. In addition to routine adjustments, changes reflected current trends of inclusion in the public schools and children's self-assessment in the field based practicum. Throughout the two years, preservice practicum tutors

frequently wrote in their journals how they hoped they had made a positive difference in their tutees' lives, more specifically, in attitudes toward reading and writing in general as well as in classroom performance in literacy areas. Since preservice teachers obviously possessed an avid interest in this topic, it was selected as the basis for a field-based research and self-assessment project.

METHOD

In January, 1995, eight preservice teachers enrolled in the Practicum in Reading undergraduate course to tutor four third and four fourth graders identified by their classroom teachers as students with reading and language arts problems that needed individual assessment and tutoring. Four of these children, two from each grade level, came from inclusion classrooms but were not the inclusion children; thus, they were not enrolled in any special programs and were not receiving any extra help though their teachers noted these children needed help in literacy development. The tutors were informed at the beginning of the semester that they would be participants in a study on self-assessment. They were apprehensive about the amount of additional work involved, a legitimate concern as their course loads and field placements are heavy in this Spring semester which precedes student teaching in the Fall for most of the enrolled students. The instructor assured tutors their roles would be limited as the instructor would conduct the review of the literature, develop the survey, distribute and collect it as well as tally and analyze the data and write the report. However, so that tutors could learn how self-assessment field research is conducted and to learn the values of self-assessment to an educator, the instructor would inform tutors of each step throughout the research and of the results. The preservice teachers were informed that they would be solicited for information they wanted concerning their tutoring and their tutees which would be included on the survey so they would benefit from the self-assessment research by learning the effects of their tutoring on their tutees. In February, practicum tutors met with their classroom teachers who were to be their supervising teachers to arrange the tutoring and discuss the tutees. At that meeting they jointly received general information from the researcher that a survey would be developed during the semester and would be sent to the classroom teachers to complete after tutoring ended. These surveys would be tallied by semester's end so preservice students could benefit from the results acquiring the information they desired to know while learning how to conduct a self-assessment research project by observing one in process and benefit from the results by reflecting and making literacy instructional decisions on the results of their tutoring.

During the next seven weeks, preservice teachers utilize formal and informal assessment procedures with a themed balanced language approach (Cunningham and Allington, 1994) where during each week's lessons they taught reading, writing, vocabulary, phonics, speaking, listening and other skills as needed (alphabet,

dictionary usage, etc.) around a hands on experience generally in math or science. The tutors used progress charts, checklists and other materials all within the inquiry method to probe the tutees thoughts daily in literacy development as well as to have the children self-assess, their accomplishments and set goals for another lesson. Tutees' self-assessments and goals were written on a daily Exit Slip (Vacca and Vacca, 1993) and the tutor responded with a messsage written to the student in the next tutoring session. Tutors maintained portfolios of all assessment procedures and work throughout the seven week session. The instructor observed Tutors at least once during their three, approximately one hour tutoring sessions each week and videotaped once during week four or five. Each observation concluded with a weekly follow up conference with the instructor. Each tutor conferenced at least twice, during week three and at the end of the tutoring semester. The supervising teacher evaluated the tutoring by completing a form and mailing to the instructor after the final tutor-supervising teacher conference. All eight tutors received high marks and positive comments on their evaluations at the midterm and on the final evaluations.

During March, the tutors were informed of the research procedures already completed by the instructor. A review of current literature was discussed along with a description of the self-assessment survey to solicit supervising teacher information on positive aspects of literacy development and succesful instructional strategies utilized by the tutors. Then the tutors were asked for input for data they wanted collected in the teacher survey to better evaluate if they had made a difference in the attitudes and academic work of tutees in classrooms. There was much participation in the brainstorming of data tutors wanted collected, some repetitive and in need of rewording completed by the instructor-researcher at a later date (See Appendix A for Survey). In April, after all tutoring had ended, one survey per tutee accompanied by one self-addressed (to the instructor) and stamped envelop was put in each supervising teacher's mailbox with a cover letter reminding them of the study and asking their compliance in completing the survey. Seven of the eight surveys were promptly returned to the instructor, tallied with preliminary results discussed with tutors. Tutors expressed reflections on the early findings were very positive as their facial smiles and happiness at the good attitudes and successful strategies teachers had observed were noted in the surveys. Tutors seemed to understand both the benefits of self-assessment,learning they had made a positive difference in the classroom lives of their tutees in attitudes and had used instructional strategies successfully. Also, they seemed to understand the steps followed in the self-assessment research procedures. During the May-June summer session, the research with tables of data, conclusions and implications were written and shared with all eight preservice teachers who were enrolled in summer school.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The classroom teachers' responses on positive aspects of literacy development noted by their observations of the seven tutored children in their classrooms and their identification of successful instructional strategies utilized by the tutors were compiled separately. Comparisons and contrastings of the responses were made between the three levels of responses, 1. frequently observed, 2. occasionally observed and 3. rarely observed. Not all statements were rated by each teacher. Hence, some statements do not have a total of seven responses identified by the tutees' supervising teachers when considering positive aspects of literacy development observed or successful instructional strategies utilized by the tutors at each level in the analysis as listed in the Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Positive characteristics that tutees exhibited in the classroom after tutoring began and classroom teachers attributed at least partially to tutoring.

Positive characteristics	frequently observed	occasion-ally observed	rarely observed
Improved attitude towards academic work	4	3	
Improved self-confidence in academic work	4	3	
Improved self-concept	2	4	1
Improved classroom behavior	4	1	2
Reads more	1	6	
Attempts more academic work	2	5	
Writes more	2	4	1
Participates more in classroom	1	5	1
Improved critical thinking		6	1
Improved problem solving		5	2
Uses self-evaluation		4	3
Uses better social (interpersonal) skills in the classroom	1	6	
Completes more academic work	3	3	1
Enjoys spelling more	3	1	3
Improved goal setting	1	3	3
Is more interested in science	3	2	2
Uses the dictionary	1	2	2
Other: thesaurus and map usage		1	

In five of the 18 statements, all responding teachers identified all of the positive characteristics exhibited by tutees at least occasionally and or frequently in their classrooms. These positive characteristics were in the areas of improved attitudes, confidence, accomplishments in their reading and academic work and in becoming more sociable. Higher numbers, receiving at least four

of the seven responses or 57% in the frequently observed positive characteristics occurred in three areas: improved attitudes and self-confidence in academic work and in improved general classroom behavior. In the occasionally observed observation, characteristic categories receiving 57% or higher observations by classroom teachers were in the areas of improved academic classwork, thinking abilities, self-concept, sociability and better able to self-evaluate. There were not any characteristics in the "rarely observed" category rated by a majority or by at least four of the teachers. However, on the five characteristics concerning spelling, vocabulary. academic work, interest in and completion of assignments and self-esteem, there was not a clear majority (at least four votes) of teachers' observation ratings in any one column. One possibility or reason for this could involve terminology definitions which may have differed between the researcher and the raters. The overall results indicate that all positive characteristics were observed in tutees by classroom teachers and noted to be present in their observations at least occasionally and attributed at least partially to the preservice teachers' tutoring. However, the nine statements receiving at least 57% or more in the occasionally observed ratings, included categories that tutors emphasized instruction in such as reading, writing, critical thinking, problem solving, and evaluation work that included progress charts, in self-concept and sociability. More research is needed on how to enable tutees to carry positive characteristics from tutoring to in their classrooms. Would more time in tutoring help to move the children's ratings in some areas from occasionally to frequently observed in the classroom or from rarely observed to occasionally observed?

Table 2. Preservice teachers' tutoring strategies that were noted by classroom teachers to be more successful with tutees.

Tutoring strategies used	frequently observed	occasionally observed	rarely observed
Use of inquiry method		7	
Hands on experiences	6	1	
Word wall	4	1	
Word wheels	3	3	
Student made dictionary	3	3	
Using laminated letters for spelling	1	5	
Marking progress charts	3	3	
Use of story maps for reading comprehension development	5	2	
Stopwatch usage	3	2	
Choice in reading material	4	3	
Rubberbanding of words to spell (sounding out words)	2	5	
Phonics application	4	2	1
Written expression	3	4	
Spelling	3	3	1
Exit slips for self-evaluation and goal setting	1	4	
Student made checklist to write better	2	4	
Alphabet writing	2	4	
Other:	0	0	0

Since only two responses occurred in the rarely observed column, all instructional strategies tutors utilized were considered successful. The five instructional strategies rated as more successful by four (57%) or more of the seven teachers were in production and manipulation areas of learning such as hands on experiences, making and using word walls, as well as in drawing and

producing their own story maps to accompany the books tutees selected to read and in applying their phonics knowledge. The latter was implemented during instruction when tutees pronounced words utilizing sounds learned in reading and using in spelling when writing. Thus, all strategies utilized by tutors were beneficial to tutees but the most beneficial appeared to be those that require tutees to do--manipulate,make decisions, use, etc.--or produce something using the information and skills learned--word walls, spelled words, etc. Of the seven instructional strategies identified by at least 57% of the teachers as only occasionally observed to be successful, there appears to be some conflict with the frequently observed strategies. Occasionally observed statements receiving a majority of the seven teacher ratings were "rubberbanding of words to spell," "written expression" and "using laminated letters for spelling," all methods utilized by the tutors to have students apply phonic knowledge. However, "phonics application" was listed as frequently observed! Was there some confusion concerning "phonics application" and in applying phonics to spelling as in spelling with laminated letters? Perhaps, some terms needed to be defined on the survey so researcher, tutors and classroom teachers would all utilize the same definitions, perhaps resulting in more aligned ratings. Another two statements receiving a majority of ratings in the occasionally observed column concerned the tutees use of self-evaluation which is the same rating this topic received in the positive characteristics (see Table 1). This is an area that tutors spent time on daily when tutees did exit slips on their accomplishments and planning for the next lesson as well as in daily updates of their progress charts and checklists. Is this concept an especially difficult one for tutees to conquer? Are the tutors not giving effective instruction in this area or is there confusion on the terminology that needs clarifying so teachers can rate more accurately? Again, more research is suggested to clarity.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Additional research is suggested to test the following conclusions and implications on the results of an undergraduate Practicum in Reading tutor self-assessment program. The conclusions and implications represent both the actual supervising teacher survey findings for tutor assessment as well as the course instructor's observations of the tutors' involvement and knowledge gained throughout the research project.

1. As a result of literacy tutoring by preservice teachers, tutees' according to their classroom teachers:

a. exhibited positive characteristics in all areas rated which included academic, social and in self concept.

b. exhibited the most positive characteristics in the areas of improved attitudes towards academic work, increased self-confidence and in better classroom behavior.

c. indicated the positive characteristics that need continued

study to find the best method and time period needed to instill in tutees so they are observed frequently by classroom teachers are vocabulary usage, reading, spelling, written expression, critical thinking, problem solving, self-evaluation, interest in and completion of academic work.

2. Classroom teachers identified, through observation of tutees in their classrooms,the following concerning the instructional strategies utilized by preservice tutors when tutoring:

a. all instructional strategies utilized for literacy development by the tutors were used successfully.

b. the instructional strategies utilized most successfully were those requiring tutees to manually manipulate materials (hands on experiments) and to produce work (word walls and story maps).

c. successful instructional strategies that need continued study to find what instructional strategies to utilized or if more tutoring time is needed to instill knowledge in tutees so that classroom teachers can rate as frequently observed in tutees are use of the inquiry method, spelling and other areas of phonics application, written expression, motivation, self-evaluation and alphabet writing.

3. There is some indication of confusion of terminology, especially in the areas related to phonic application resulting in conflicting ratings in similar areas throughout the survey. Hence, some clarification of terminology in the survey is needed so that rater and researcher use the same definitions.

4. Tutors did observe the instructor-researcher modeling self-assessment research steps and techniques throughout the semester and tutor suggestions on data to collect were used in the survey thus involving them in the research.

5. Tutors did seem to understand and appreciate the results of all steps in the self-assessment research process on their tutoring as demonstrated by their involvement in providing data they wanted collected on the survey and by their very enthusiastic interest and acceptance of the results.

SUMMARY

This study to model self-assessment field research and procedures for preservice teachers was to be a beginning for a lifetime development in reflective and creative decision making based on sound research for them. Since the study was conducted on the preservice teachers' tutees' classroom progress after a seven week tutoring session, the preservice teachers had a vested interest in the self-assessment results as they wanted to know in they had made

a difference in the lives of the tutored children. In the survey results, the tutees' classroom teachers gave a resounding "yes" to the tutors! They indeed had made a difference in the positive attitudes and work habits exhibited in daily classroom behavior by the tutored children. This was identified by classroom teachers as a direct result of the tutors successfully utilizing instructional strategies with the tutees. Thus, preservice teachers received very good news from the self-assessing survey and hopefully, will look forward to and utilize often self-assessing field research procedures observed throughout this study to ensure the quality of their instructional and other educational decisions in the future of their chosen careers.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY OF TUTORED CHILDREN
SPRING SEMESTER, 1995

Please respond to each statement according to your classroom observations of the child tutored by an Averett College tutor during the Spring, 1995 semester. If you had more than one child tutored, please complete one survey for each child and mail each survey in its own envelop.

Please write the appropriate number--1, 2 or 3 beside each statement according to the following:

1 = frequently observed
2 = occasionally observed
3 = rarely observed

I. Positive characteristics that this child exhibits in the classroom since tutoring began and you attribute at least partially to tutoring are:

____ improved attitude towards academic work

____ improved self-confidence in academic work

____ improved self-concept

____ improved classroom behavior

____ reads more

____ attempts more academic work

____ writes more

____ participates more in classwork

____ improved critical thinking

____ improved problem solving

____ uses self-evaluation

____ uses better social (interpersonal) sills in the classroom

____ completes more academic work

____ enjoys spelling more

____ improved goal setting

____ is more interested in science

____ uses the dictionary

____ other: thesaurus and map usage

II. Tutoring strategies that seem more successful are: (please mark according to:

1 = more successful
2 = somewhat successful
3 = not successful

____ use of inquiry method

____ hands on experiences

____ word wall

____ word wheels

____ student made dictionary

____ using laminated letters for spelling

____ marking progress charts

____ use of story maps for reading comprehension development

____ stopwatch usage

____ choice in reading material

____ rubberbanding to words to spell (sounding out words)

____ phonics application

____ written expression

____ spelling

____ exit slips for self evaluation and goal setting

____ student made checklist to write better

____ alphabet writing

____ other:

This completes the survey. Please mail in the stamped and self addressed envelop. Thank you for your help!